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ABSTRACT

Youths who approved of adventurous, youth-oriented activities were likely to be more involved in delinquent behavior than those who did not, but no relationship was found between approval of more serious offenses and extent of delinquent involvement. Based on questionnaire responses from institutionalized girls in two juvenile reformatories, findings indicate that attitudes of those engaging in serious delinquent activity were similar to the attitudes of those who did not. This argues against the common assumption that delinquents have values different from nondelinquents. Instead, support emerged for the argument that delinquents drift into and out of delinquent behavior. It appears that individuals engage in delinquent behavior because they are periodically released from moral constraint. (BN)

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Do Female Delinquents Drift?*

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ABSTRACT: Do Female Delinquents Drift?

This project examines an often debated, but untested, theoretical issue. That is, the nature and extent of delinquent subcultures. Specifically, do delinquent and nondelinquent females adhere to the same or opposing value systems?

No existing research examines this issue among female populations. In fact, only one project has examined it among males (Hindelang, 1970). But because of methodological flaws inherent in that project, his findings and conclusions are suspect.

Our data came from questionnaire responses of 96 institutionalized females from two juvenile reformatories in the southeastern United States. Data were subjected to chi square (X^2), phi (ϕ), and correlational analysis (r) techniques. In a general sense, our findings lend support to the theoretical position of the control theorists.

Do Female Delinquents Drift?

Most delinquency theories focus on males. Thus, it is not surprising that delinquency research also is largely oriented toward them. But this lack of research on female delinquents should not imply that studying them is any less important, especially in light of existing official crime statistics.[1]

This study extends a growing body of research focusing on female delinquency. Specifically, our concern is with examining the merits of a theoretical controversy rarely explicated in the literature. That is, the nature and extent of delinquent subcultures. This issue reached its peak in the late 1950s and early 1960s when Sykes and Matza (1957) and Matza (1964) rejected propositions advanced by Cohen (1955) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960). The debate focused on whether delinquents replace conventional values with an "oppositional" value orientation (Cohen, 1955; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960) or if they believe in conventional values even while violating them (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Matza, 1964).

Cohen (1955) argued that delinquents have been inadequately trained to compete for status in the "middle class" world. Consequently, they are forced into creating an "oppositional" value system, one in which they can compete successfully. Through the process of reaction formation frustrated youths turn societal values upside down and obey this new code. Delinquent conduct is therefore acceptable in their subculture precisely because it is considered wrong by the conventional order. Similarly, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argued that delinquents adhere to a conduct code diametrically opposed to official rules and regulations.

But in 1961, Matza and Sykes extended their "techniques of neutralization"

thesis (Sykes and Matza, 1957) and proposed that delinquents and non-delinquents shared similar value codes. In other words, Matza and Sykes suggested that both delinquent and nondelinquents adhered to an identical value system. Later, Matza (1964:50) elaborated upon this position:

> . . . my thesis is that the subculture of delinquency entertains the commission of delinquencies under widely available extenuating conditions, but it does not commit adherents to their misdeeds.

For Matza then, delinquents have been epsiodically released from the moral constraint of the conventional order; they are free to "drift" into delinquency, but not constrained to do so.

To recapitulate, then, the salient theoretical issue raised by these contrasting ideologies is simple: do delinquents and nondelinquents adhere to similar or contrasting value systems? Unfortunately, this question has not been adequately addressed at an empirical level.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

To date the most notable attempt to empirically resolve this issue has been Hindelang's (1970). Based on an analysis of the relation between delinquency and approval of delinquency behavior, Hindelang concluded Matza's (1964) contentions were inaccurate, while those advanced by sub-cultural theorists (Cohen, 1955; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960) were supported.

However, his conclusions are both questionable and restricted because of several methodological weaknesses inherent in his research. First, his sample consisted of only 69 male respondents from a middle class, sectarian high school. Of the 26 delinquent activities for which respondents were asked to report their involvement, chi square (X^2) values could not be computed for 11 of them because of low participation (or involvement) in the acts. Consequently, Hindelang's analysis is based on a relatively narrow

sampling of both respondents and delinquent activities. Second, his research subjects were requested to record the number of times during the last 12 months they engaged in any one of 26 specific delinquent activities. Hindelang then dichotomized the sample into "delinquent" and "nondelinquent" groupings based on whether or not an individual committed a specific delinquent act at least once during this period. The shortcoming with this procedure is obvious. Not only did Hindelang make it extremely easy for youngsters to be classified "delinquent," but he also generated an excessive amount of unaccountable variability between an individual's reported delinquent activity and his own approval-disapproval rating of that behavior. For many youths, the delinquent behavior could have occurred as long as one year in the past, while their approval-disapproval rating was reflecting their attitudes at the time the questionnaire was administered. Interestingly, Hindelang (1970:507) recognized this shortcoming and suggested that future projects correct it. Third, Hindelang's research may also be faulted for restricting his sample to males. Even though both subcultural and control theories have traditionally focused on male delinquency, there is reference among subcultural writings to females being just as likely to alter their value orientations.[2]

But beyond the preceding mechanical difficulties, Hindelang's project suffered from substantive deficiencies. Specifically, his interpretation of findings contains two flaws. First, he did not have a sufficient number of cases to justify interpretations based on percentages. Given his table scheme, a single case could represent from two to five percent of the cases of a particular category. Second, Hindelang's use of chi square to determine if an association existed between the commission of a delinquent act and approval of that behavior is suspect. In fact, on two of the three

contingency tables he presents in his analysis, the marginals are substantially skewed. Further, half the cells, among the three tables, involve expected frequencies which are less than 10. These two deficiencies, coupled with the fact that the sampling distribution of the chi square statistic is approximated only when a large number of cases is used, seriously undermine the interpretation drawn from his analysis.

Thus, because methodological errors restrict the applicability of Hindelang's research from resolving the theoretical controversy explicated, it is necessary that research which does is undertaken. This project moves in that direction.

METHODS

Institutionalized girls, ages 12-17 years, in two juvenile reformatories in the southeastern United States comprise the base population.[3] Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire administered by the school principal in each institution during regular class sessions. At the time of the study 137 youths were incarcerated in the two target institutions--35 in one and 102 in the other. Of this initial group of inmates, only 121 were available for contact when data collection began, since some inmates were transferred, released, or confined in orientation cottages. After further shrinkage caused by refusal or inability to properly complete the instrument, we were able to obtain usable questionnaire data from 27 inmates in the first institution and 69 inmates in the second institution. These respondents represent 77% and 68% of the respective base populations. Because no significant differences in responses of the juveniles in the two institutions were detected, the data were collapsed across institutions.[4] Respondents were asked to record how often in the three months prior to their institutionalization they engaged in a selected set of activities. Also, they were asked to evaluate whether each of these behaviors was one about

which they strongly approved, approved, disapproved, strongly disapproved, or were undecided.

Each activity was analyzed separately and respondents were dichotomized into "delinquent" and "nondelinquent" groupings.[5] Similarly, the approval scores for each activity was dichotomized as indicating either "approval" or "disapproval" of the activity.[6] To assess the nature of the relationship between commission of an act (as estimated via the delinquent activity checklist) and the approval-disapproval of the same act, a chi square (X^2) analysis was employed in order to test for significance and phi (ϕ) coefficients were computed to measure the strength of relationships.[7]

Assuming the subcultural theorists are accurate (as Hindelang asserted), we would expect youngsters who have committed a specific delinquent act to be more likely to express approval of that act than children who have not committed it. However, if Matza's contentions are correct, then the approval rating for a specific act committed by the delinquent group should be similar to that of the nondelinquent group. This methodological procedure establishes a comparison group by which to judge those who engage in a specific behavior. Because each activity is treated separately, we are able to determine the extent that individuals are committed to the values and norms which support <u>their</u> particular delinquent activity.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. First examining Table 1, we note that only 9 of the 25 activities show significant associations between delinquent involvement and the approval of delinquent acts. Among the more serious offenses there is virtually no difference in approval ratings between those engaging in the act and those not engaging in the act. This finding contradicts Hindelang's expectation that the differences in approval between participants and nonparticipants of

the more serious delinquent acts would be greater than the differences in approval of the less serious acts. As seen in Table 1, relationships between involvement and approval of the act exist for only the relatively less serious delinquencies.

It is instructive to note that in Table 1 the 9 acts demonstrating a significant association with approval have been commonly associated with a youthful personification of daring and adventure. Along this line Matza (1964) would suggest that these offenses simply exhibit the pursuit of subterranean values by youthful offenders, centering around the search for excitment, thrills, or kicks. Their delinquent behavior reflects not an oppositional value system (i.e., a delinquent subculture) but an exaggeration and immature variation of the unverbalized subterranean values pursued by many adults. Such delinquents have merely picked-up and emphasized a less respectable part of the dominant value system.

Exploring this argument further, we now examine the strength of the relationship between incidence of a given activity and approval of that delinquent act. As shown by the phi coefficients in Table 1, the strongest relationships were obtained for those common, youth-oriented activities involving alcohol (e.g., drinking, .19; getting drunk, .25) and drugs (e.g., using marijuana, .37; using LSD, .29; sniffing glue, .35). Conversely, the weakest relationships were observed for such serious offenses as assault with a weapon (.03), theft greater than $10 (.04), theft less than $10 (.06), and property destruction less than $10 (.03) and greater than $10 (.10).

The lack of association between approval given to an act and incidence of that act for the serious offenses suggests that delinquents are essentially in agreement with conventional conduct norms. They are not, as Cloward and Ohlin (1960) and Cohen (1955) have argued, committed to delinquent values as we would expect, especially from an institutionalized population (see Footnote 3). Further, the strongest association between approval and delinquent

involvement for the less serious acts lends support to the Matza and Sykes (1961:217) contention that "the delinquent has picked up and emphasized one part of the dominant value system, namely, the subterranean values. . . ."

Thus far we have looked at the association between approval and behavior for each activity separately. Now we examine the relationship between approval of each act and a composite score representing both frequency and severity of delinquent involvement. The severity-frequency index was constructed as follows. Each respondent rated the seriousness of each of the 25 delinquent acts on a seven-point scale. The mean rating for each act was then multiplied by the corresponding reported frequency of that behavior. The resulting severity-frequency scores were then subjected to a principal component factor analysis. Loadings on the first unrotated factor for each act were multiplied by the respective standardized scores for each act and the products were summed.[8]

Correlation coefficients (r) were then computed for each approval item with the severity-frequency index (see Table 2).[9] Over half of the 25 coefficients are significant. Nearly all of the significant correlations involve approval of the relatively less serious delinquencies. Simply, those who approve of the adventurous, youth-oriented activities are likely to be more frequent and serious delinquents than those who do not approve of such activities (e.g., drinking, .32; getting drunk, .26; using marijuana, .39; racing, .39; and using a false ID, .34). Yet there is apparently no relationship between approval of the more serious offenses and extent of delinquent involvement (e.g., theft greater than $10, -.04; theft less than $10, -.01; using heroin, .05; property destruction greater than $10, .10; and property destruction less than $10, .02).

Such findings further support Matza's contention that delinquent behavior represents an episodic release from moral constraint and the pursuit of subterranean, not oppositional, values. The data are congruent with the view that basic cultural values are accepted by delinquents even as they violate them.

SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

Following a correction of several methodological errors in Hindelang's (1970) research, the findings from this study lend support to the theoretical position of the control theorists. All 9 of the delinquent activities that showed a significant association between delinquent involvement and approval of that act involved relatively less serious offenses. For the remaining 16 delinquent acts approval scores of delinquents and nondelinquents were similar. Further, on the basis of the correlational analysis we find that those youths who approved of the adventurous, youth-oriented activities were likely to be more involved in delinquent behavior than those who did not, but no relationship was found between approval of the more serious offenses and extent of delinquent involvement. Our results thus indicate that attitudes of those engaging in serious delinquent activity did not differ from those not engaging in that activity. The assumption of subcultural theorists that delinquents have values different from nondelinquents, at least for serious offenses, is rejected.

The research provides support for the argument that delinquents "drift" into and out of delinquent behavior. Of course this assumes that delinquents have internalized values and norms which proscribe delinquent involvement. The above findings offer initial evidence that this internalization has indeed taken place, and we must conclude that our data lend support to the assertion that individuals engage in delinquent behavior because they are "episodically released from moral constraint" (Matza, 1964:69).

Additionally, our findings support Matza and Sykes's "subterranean value" notion that delinquent behavior reflects the values held by the leisure class. We have noted that for the offenses where there was an association between delinquent involvement and approval-disapproval rating of that behavior, these offenses could be categorized as exhibiting a search

for "kicks" or "thrills" by the delinquent youth. According to Matza and Sykes (1961:716), it is important to recognize that subterranean values are ". . . in conflict or in competition with other deeply held values but which are still recognized and accepted by many." All classes of people pursue "leisure class values." But middle class adults limit their expression of these values more sharply than do delinquents. Our data are consonant with the notion that the search for adventure, excitement, and thrills (subterranean values) exists side by side with the more conventional values. Such a perspective offers an explanation why delinquents as well as non-delinquents similarly opposed involvement in serious crimes, while delinquents expressed greater approval of adventure-oriented delinquencies.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]We refer specifically to the Uniform Crime Reports for the years 1973-1976. Examination of these official crime statistics for each year reveals a considerable increase in female involvement in criminal behavior.

[2]For a more extensive discussion of the subcultural position on this issue, see: Cohen, A. and J. Short, "Research in delinquent subcultures," Journal of Social Issues, 14, 3:20-37, 1958.

[3]The maximum length of institutionalization for the respondents was 8 months. The median length of stay was less than 3 months. Thus, in a few cases we did not improve upon Hindelang's (1970) technique, but, for the most part, the error variance between behavior and attitude was reduced considerably. In addition by using an institutionalized population we are actually providing a more conservative test of Matza's position and a less conservative test of Cohen's. That is since an institutionalized population produces a large proportion of subjects who are more serious and persistent offenders, the likelihood of finding differences in approval scores among these delinquents is increased (see Nettler, 1974). So, if Cohen is not supported here (i.e., an absence of differences), it is expected that a noninstitutionalized population would also yield no differences (see Matza, 1964:48-50).

[4]Initially separate analyses of the data for each institution were performed along the same lines as those presented in Table 1 and Table 2. Conclusions of results from separate analyses did not differ from those drawn from the combined samples. In other words, when chi square, phi, and correlational analyses were examined for each institution separately, they were not significantly different from one another to warrant separate comparisons.

[5]In our study, respondents were classified as "delinquent" if they engaged in the specific behavior activity at least once in the three months prior to their institutionalization. They were classified as "nondelinquent" if they reported not engaging in the specific behavior activity in the three months prior to their institutionalization.

[6]The disapproval category was formed by collapsing the "strongly disapprove" and "disapprove" responses; the approval category was formed by collapsing the "strongly approve," "approve," and "indifferent" responses. This is the same technique used by Hindelang (1970). Theoretically, the inclusion of the "indifferent" responses in the approval category seems justified in that those who express an indifference toward delinquent conduct demonstrate a lack of commitment to the conventional moral order that disapproves of such activity. Thus, respondents may best be categorized as those who "disapprove" and those who "fail to disapprove" of delinquent behavior.

[7]Phi(ϕ) is simply the product-moment coefficient of correlation for dichotomous data. In the 2 x 2 table ϕ attains its upper limit of 1.0 when two diagonally opposite cells are both empty and its lower limit of 0 when diagonal products are equal.

[8] Each subject's severity-frequency scale score is given by the following equation:

$$S = \sum_{i=1}^{25} (f_i \cdot Z_i)$$

where S is the composite severity-frequency scale score, f_i, is the factor loading between variable i and the first unrotated common factor, Z $[Z = (X_i - \bar{X}_i)/sd_i]$ is the standard score on observed variable i for each subject in the sample, and the summation is over the i observed variables in the composite.

The use of a one-factor scale solution allows us to take into account the differential contribution of each item to the central property in common to a set of items subjected to a principal component factor analysis (Armor, 1974:28). This technique thus yields a scale score that represents a weighted composite of the severity and frequency of the subject's delinquent activity.

[9] In the computation of correlation coefficients all approval items were scored on a 1 to 5 disapprove-approve scale.

TABLE 1

Percent Approving of Delinquent Act by Commission of Act[a]

Activity	Delinquent Act Committed Within Last Three Months: No	Yes	X^2[b]	ø
Using a false ID	25% (16)	66% (21)	13.20*	.39
Drag racing	21% (13)	60% (21)	12.91*	.39
Using marijuana	28% (5)	73% (57)	11.21*	.39
Sniffing glue	19% (10)	52% (23)	10.12*	.35
Getting drunk	41% (14)	76% (48)	9.92*	.34
Using LSD	42% (24)	72% (28)	7.07*	.29
Using heroin	37% (18)	64% (30)	6.00*	.27
Drinking	38% (13)	65% (40)	5.12*	.25
Gang fighting	40% (18)	63% (32)	4.09*	.23
Gang fight w/weapon	22% (16)	44% (11)	3.22	.21
Carrying weapon	30% (13)	49% (26)	2.75	.19
Drunk driving	22% (16)	40% (10)	2.04	.17
Gambling	41% (28)	59% (16)	2.03	.17
Fighting	30% (8)	45% (31)	1.30	.14
Prostitution	57% (49)	80% (8)	1.13	.14
Premarital sex	52% (22)	65% (35)	1.04	.13
Prop. dest.>$10	48% (33)	37% (10)	.53	.10
Cheating	31% (15)	40% (19)	.41	.09
Cutting school	32% (6)	43% (33)	.40	.09
Theft < $10	25% (21)	33% (4)	.07	.06
Hit & run accident	20% (12)	25% (9)	.07	.06
Theft > $10	32% (17)	36% (15)	.05	.04
Prop. des. < $10	16% (9)	18% (7)	.00	.03
Shakedown	30% (19)	27% (9)	.00	.03
Fight w/weapon	35% (25)	38% (9)	.00	.03

[a] N=96 for each act

[b] df=1

*p .05

NOTE: N's in parentheses

TABLE 2

Correlation Between Approval Items and Severity-Frequency Index

Approval Items	r
Drag racing	.39*
Using marijuana	.39*
Fighting	.37*
Carrying weapons	.37*
Using a false ID	.34*
Drinking	.32*
Fighting w/weapon	.28*
Getting drunk	.26*
Using LSD	.23*
Cutting school	.23*
Hit and run auto accident	-.20*
Gang fight w/weapon	.17*
Drunk driving	.17*
Sniffing glue	.17*
Gang fighting	.11
Property destruction > $10	.10
Premarital sex	.10
Cheating	-.07
Gambling	.07
Shakedown	-.07
Using heroin	.05
Theft greater than $10	-.04
Prostitution	.03
Property destruction < $10	.02
Theft less than $10	-.01

*$p \leq .05$